

Search engine optimization tips

2005 Project09.com

Title Tag

One of the highest contributing factors to your placement in search engines is your title tag, and its relevance to the user's search query. Your title tag should include the section of your site, the topic of the page, and the name of your site. I generally use the following structure...

YourSite.com: Category: Page title

You can include any keywords and descriptions after that, which may help your rankings even more...

YourSite.com: Category: Page title: Boating supplies, Boating locations...

Don't make your title tag too long, as your keywords will become less relevant!

Sitemap

A sitemap is a great way for your users to find pages when they're lost, it's also great for search engine spiders. Including a link to all pages in your site will increase the chance of your whole site being crawled.

Don't make your sitemap too large. Most search engines will not crawl pages over a certain number of kilobytes. If you have a large number of pages in your site, then only link to your site's categories, which contain your pages or subcategories.

If you're still concerned about your page's file size, maybe you should look into converting your site's code to XHTML/CSS, which has been known to

reduce file sizes by up to 60%.

Define your headings

An excellent way to highlight the topic of the page is to add a heading wrapped in <h1> tags. Search engine spiders identify this as the topic of the page. Make sure to include your page's keywords in your heading tags, or whatever the topic of the page may be.

Its not just beneficial for your search engine rankings, but your users will find your page easier to navigate, now that the information is clearly set out and easy to read. If you dont like the default style that <h1> tags add to your font, you can always use CSS to change the look. Search engine spiders do not look at CSS of pages, so you can always fake a heading, and make it look like your default font size.

Avoid Flash and Javascript

First of all, spiders are incapable of crawling flash sites, obviously. I have never been a fan of all-flash sites, for a number of reasons, one of them being the loading times, but I won't go into that. Of course, if your site is not largely content based (Eg. web design portfolio), then flash may be a great tool... if you use it appropriately. Dont expect to do great in search engine results though.

This doesn't just apply to all-flash sites, but also to flash navigation bars or menus. Spiders cannot crawl these, so your site's subpages will be invisible, unless you have other sites linking to those pages. If you must use flash, be sure to include a text link alternative for spiders or non-flash browsers.

These rules also apply to dhtml and javascript menus, so before you use these scripts, make sure they can be viewed by search engines.

Keyword Usage

Be sure to include your page's keyword's within the text. A short description at the top of the page is a very common and useful method to include your page's keywords.

When your page gets indexed by search engines, its description will most often be listed on the results page, because it has the highest concentration of keywords.

Submit your site

Be sure to submit your site to all relevant web directories which will increase your targetted traffic. There are hundreds of free directories based on many different topics. Search engine spiders often crawl these directories, which means they have a higher chance of finding your site.

A good directory is Dmoz.org, which is currently used by hundreds of other sites. Submitting your site to Dmoz is free, but depending on what section your site falls under, it may be difficult to get accepted. You will have a better chance of being accpeted if you choose a category which is less active.

Avoid using dynamic url's

Spiders generally do not like pages containing dynamic url's, or variables. These pages often do not get crawled.

A common solution to this problem is the use of Apache's mod_rewrite, which can automatically change your urls to a more friendly structure. Here is a common url as an example...

<http://yoursite.com/phones.php?catagory=mobile&phone=3315>

With mod_rewrite we can change this to a clear, and easy to read url....

<http://yoursite.com/phones/mobile/3315/>

Now doesn't that look much better? Search engines spiders will love it.

File Names

How you name your files also is a contributing factor to your rankings. Try to include your pages keywords in the name. I like to replace spaces with - to make it readable, and also let spiders know that it's meant to be a space.

A good idea is to make your filename match your heading on the page. This will increase your keyword count of the overall page, making your page appear higher in the search engine results.

Mod_rewrite, which we discussed earlier, can also be used effectively for file naming issues.

Conclusion

I hope these tips helped you, and you now understand how spiders work. The important thing to remember is not to compromise the functionality or useability of your site for search engine optimization. In the end, its always going to be a person viewing your site, not a spider.